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Exclusive: NTP Scientific Director Tells The Defender What He Couldn't Tell the Court

The National Toxicology Program's (NTP) former scientific director Brian Berridge, DVM, Ph.D., on Monday testified in the landmark fluoride trial. The judge didn't allow testimony about possible political influence over the NTP report's publication, but Berridge told The Defender after the hearing that such pressures raised serious concerns for public health.

By Brenda Baletti, Ph.D.

23

Brian Berridge photo credit: National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

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Editor's note: *The Defender is providing daily updates on the landmark trial pitting Fluoride Action Network against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The trial started Feb. 1. To read previous coverage, click here.*

The former scientific director of the National Toxicology Program (NTP) on Monday took the stand on the fourth day of a landmark trial on water fluoridation, despite efforts by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to scuttle his testimony.

Brian Berridge, DVM, Ph.D., testified about the initial findings in the NTP's draft report linking fluoride to lower IQ in children.

Berridge also outlined the process leading up to the court-ordered release of the report in March 2023. He was limited to discussing the formal NTP report publication process — not his thoughts on whether political concerns may have influenced or delayed that process — because of an April 2023 ruling that those observations fall outside the scope of the trial.

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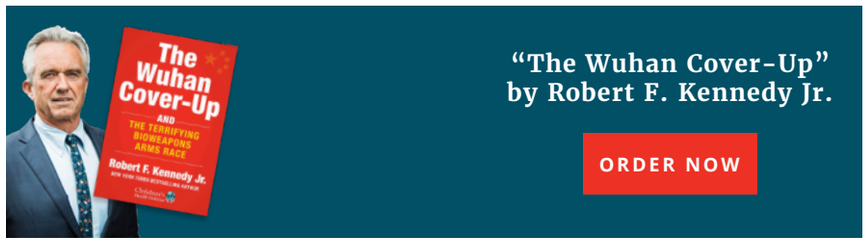
However, The Defender later in the day caught up with Berridge, who was able to speak more freely about his concerns.



Now retired, Berridge said that at the time, he was annoyed by how the NTP report publication process played out because he believed it was an outcome of public health agencies' desires to protect the practices they already have in place.

As a result, he said, public health officials are ignoring that some people are being exposed to fluoride at high levels.

"This lack of consideration for all the possible people who could be harmed by [water fluoridation] so that we don't implicate something that we have intentionally done bothers me a lot," he said.

As an outcome of the agencies protecting their existing practices, the necessary research on fluoride exposure hasn't been done, despite major indicators that it needed to be investigated, Berridge said.

Food & Water Watch, Fluoride Action Network, Moms Against Fluoridation and other advocacy groups and individuals are suing the EPA in a bid to force the agency to prohibit water fluoridation in the U.S. due to fluoride's toxic effects on children's developing brains.

In December 2023, the EPA moved to exclude Berridge's testimony, arguing that he would speak to the political influence allegedly exerted to stop publication of the NTP's report on fluoride, rather than to the scientific findings in the report, which federal Judge Edward Chen previously ruled must be the focus of the trial.

The NTP, a subagency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that produces scientific research meant to inform policymaking, concluded in the report that prenatal and childhood exposure to higher levels of fluoride is associated with decreased IQ in children.

It also found that given that children are exposed to fluoride from multiple sources, there was "no obvious threshold" at which fluoridating water would be safe.

The NTP sought to publish its report in May 2022, but dental officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) pressured HHS Assistant Secretary for Health Rachel Levine to prevent the review from being published.

Levine told the NTP to not publish the report but to put it on hold and allow for further review.

Plaintiffs submitted documents obtained via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) revealing this intervention to the court prompting Chen to rule that the trial should go forward using the draft report from the NTP.

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American Dental Association sought to suppress NTP report

During Monday's testimony, Berridge told the court the first draft of the NTP

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report classified fluoride as a hazard.

Then, because the NTP recognized the controversial, or "sensitive" nature of the fluoride issue, it took the unusual step of asking the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) to review the report — in addition to the standard external expert peer reviewers — to lend weight to the NTP's findings.

In response to NASEM's comments, the NTP decided to forgo making a formal hazard classification for fluoride, instead publishing a "state-of-the-science" report that would present the data and allow policymakers to evaluate the evidence themselves

That determination was "a reflection of the 'sensitivity' of the issue and the challenges in making a hard conclusion," Berridge testified.

The NTP also shared the report with other interested agencies within HHS.

In early 2022, Berridge signed off on the report and as scientific director, he considered it final — a decision that typically leads to immediate publication. However, in this case, Levine blocked the report and sent it for further review by the NTP's Board of Scientific Counselors.

On cross-examination, the EPA's attorney used the NASEM review to try to discredit the findings of the NTP report, suggesting the report remains in draft form because of some inadequacy.

American Dental Association (ADA) spokesperson Howard Pollick, a long-time fluoridation supporter who is attending the trial, echoed the EPA attorney's position.

Pollick told The Defender he didn't read the report, but that it hadn't been "acceptable" in peer review and is therefore incomplete and shouldn't be published.

In May 2023, Pollick said, he submitted a letter to this effect to the NTP's board, which was adjudicating the final publication of the report.

Plus, he said, anything is toxic at high levels. "If you drink too much water in a period of time you can die."

He also said fluoridated water is important for addressing tooth decay, especially for parents who "don't pay too much attention" to what their children are eating or how often they clean their teeth.

Documents obtained by plaintiffs through FOIA revealed the ADA had early access to the NTP report and actively sought to prevent its publication.

Was NTP report modified to 'fit commercial interests'?

Berridge told The Defender the quality of the NTP report was unimpeachable. "You would be hard-pressed to find an analysis that has the level of rigor and review that this particular analysis does," he said.

Contrary to arguments put forward by the EPA, the extensive level of review the report was subjected to had nothing to do with the quality of the work. "I think that the incredibly unusual level of review here is a reflection of the fact that there are significant stakeholder interests," Berridge said.

"Some of those are more biased than others," he added.

Berridge said he thought the "challenges" brought by reviewers were "misguided" and that some of the input, namely from other agencies within HHS, was "not supported by the evidence" and so the NTP declined to incorporate those suggestions.

When asked if an administrator at HHS had ever previously intervened to block the publication of a scientific report, as Levine did with the NTP report, he said, "It certainly had never happened during my tenure there. I'm not aware of that having happened in the past."

Berridge also commented on his emails, made public via FOIA, where he voiced concerns that efforts were being made to "modify [the NTP report] to fit commercial interests," and that the unprecedented challenges and number of reviews had been "obstructive."

Berridge said:

> "I did voice concerns that I felt like there was an extraordinary amount of challenge coming from some of the stakeholders, and these are stakeholders that would have an obvious bias."
>
> "Obviously the CDC division of oral health would have a bias. This is something that they have advocated for a very long time, and NIDCR is sort of a research representative of the dental community, obviously it would have a bias."

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'The public has a right to know'

Berridge told The Defender that although water fluoridation was a major point of discussion in the lawsuit, the NTP didn't narrowly look at water fluoridation.

The NTP's findings, he said, reflect the possible health effects that come from a child's total exposure to fluoride.

"Water fluoridation is just one possible source of exposure," Berridge said. It can't be considered in isolation given that there are also many other simultaneous possible points of fluoride exposure.

The risk assessors have to consider the evidence of broader exposure to assess whether people are being exposed to levels that present a hazard.

Berridge told The Defender:

> "The reality of it is, is that there are people in the United States who are being exposed to extraordinary levels. And so whether you believe that water fluoridation is a potential source of hazard because of the fluoride is irrespective of the fact that there are people who are being exposed that are at risk because they also have different sources of exposure [in addition to water]."

He called for more research. "This potential was raised as far back as 2006 by the National Research Council," he said. "We have had lots of opportunities since 2006 to really put a lot of effort into understanding whether in the United States or anywhere else we are unfortunately and unintentionally exposing folks to levels of fluoride or any other agent that could be a cause of harm.

We haven't done "our due diligence," Berridge said. "We didn't go out and do the kinds of studies that would've made this much clearer and that I find bothersome as well."

He added:

> "For me as a scientist, the impetus here is to do what it takes to get the evidence to make sure that we're not doing something that is putting people at risk, particularly when it relates to children.
>
> "And I personally believe we could have done a better job than we've done, and that's where we ought to be focusing our attention on clarifying the evidence, not getting into debate."

Berridge also said that although the NTP's work is meant to support regulators and policymakers, its research should also inform the general public, so people can make their own decisions about how they mitigate risk in their lives.

"The public has a right to know what the evidence is so that even if the EPA is not making a change or the FDA [U.S. Food and Drug Administration] or whoever the regulators are, then at least people can make informed decisions," he said. "And when you're not permitted to put that evidence in the public sphere, it prevents people from being able to do that."

Berridge retired from the NTP last year. He said the NTP report controversy wasn't the only factor in his retirement, but it certainly influenced his decision.

"I had concerns that this didn't play out in keeping with the policy as it relates to protecting scientific integrity," Berridge said. "I'm not telling you anything that's not in print, but I'm also not walking back from it because I believe it's true," he said.

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Brenda Baletti, Ph.D.

Brenda Baletti Ph.D. is a reporter for The Defender. She wrote and taught about capitalism and politics for 10 years in the writing program at Duke University. She holds a Ph.D. in human geography from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master's from the University of Texas at Austin.

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holisticpoet
5 days ago edited

..."fluoridated water is important for addressing tooth decay, especially for parents who "don't pay too much attention" to what their children are eating or how often they clean their teeth."

So if we take Howard Pollick's above statement and apply it the candy and snack industry, should we not allow foods with high amounts of sugar and or highly acidic beverages such as soda to be consumed by anyone because parents may not be paying attention to what they themselves and their children are eating or drinking? There is such a double standard when it comes to politics and money.

Then there is the question that; are the parents not paying attention to what they and their children are eating because they have ingested too much fluoride?

18 0 Reply • Share ›

OGuillory ↗ holisticpoet
5 days ago

...or...do the parents think dental hygiene is not important because of the myths told about fluoride? If fluoride is the savior...why brush?

7 0 Reply • Share ›

Timothy Patrick Fay
5 days ago

Some years ago Harvard Medical School did a study on fluoride and found that brushing your teeth with water has the same results as brushing your teeth with toothpaste with fluoride.

15 0 Reply • Share ›

glissmeister ↗ Timothy Patrick Fay
5 days ago edited

I worry the anti-fluoride folks are missing a most important argument to be making: There is no benefit from fluoride ion treatment concentrations in drinking water from a dental perspective. Fluoride is used by dental professionals as a topically-applied-kill at much higher concentrations with strident efforts to PREVENT swallowing before excess free fluoride residue is rinsed and spit out from the mouth. They use this topically applied fluoride at a dose concentration established that is necessary to kill dental caries bacteria on contact. This higher dose concentration and longer dwell time demonstrates factually that ingesting fluoride ions added to drinking water at concentrations orders of magnitude lower cannot possibly be effective in killing dental caries on contact during the act of drinking and swallowing fluoride treated drinking water. Once swallowed, neither can fluoride be used as a systemic poison that passes through the stomach into the bloodstream that returns it to the gums and teeth to kill the dental caries bacteria on contact; the concentration is orders of magnitude too low to kill dental caries bacteria on contact. So why then is the concentration of fluoride in drinking water not increased if it not effective? Simple. The label of fluoride ion concentrates are Danger - Poison "skull and crossbones" labels. The most toxic and most dangerous rodenticides known to man are fluorinated and are no longer

see more

8 0 Reply • Share ›

Manfred Mayer ↗ Timothy Patrick Fay
5 days ago

Reference?

0 0 Reply • Share ›

kibitzer3
5 days ago

Bottom line: If someone wasn't making money on the addition of Fl to the drinking water supply (or in toothpaste, etc.), it wouldn't be happening. Including the 'making' of money from not having to *spend* money to clean it up as a toxic waste by-product of their manufacturing process.

11 0 Reply • Share ›

cjae
5 days ago

I have to laugh at the TV dental commercials that say, "approved by the American Dental Association". Most people don't know how the ADA got started. I'll tell you how they got started. Many years ago, they knew mercury (amalgams) fillings were dangerous to the recipient's health. Some dentists stopped using amalgams, the dentist who didn't, (because amalgam was cheap) started the American Dental Association. This is how the ADA got started. They basically put profit over the safety of their patients' health so, it makes sense that spokesperson Howard Pollick for the American Dental Association (ADA) would support and defend the fluoridation of water which from everything I've read on it has no benefit to a person's dental health. In fact, it's quite the opposite. So, if it says, "APPROVED BY THE AMERICAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION" .....DON'T BUY IT

11 0 Reply • Share ›

Nancy Bryson
5 days ago edited

I have heard it said that expecting the tiny concentration of fluoride in drinking water to minimize tooth decay is like drinking a bottle of sunscreen and expecting it to prevent sunburn. But fluoride at these low concentrations can be harmful to, at the least, the pineal and pituitary glands. Also, I have read that the motivation for fluoridating water is that a chemical compound containing fluorine is used in the industrial production of aluminum metal, and so the fluorine-containing by-product of the process "needs a place to go" and thus is added to drinking water at an economic benefit to the industrial suppliers.

I suspect that that is mostly true. I try to never to imbibe water from the city source.

10 0 Reply • Share ›

Paul Hastilow
5 days ago

How often do we see the same issue between Agencies and suppliers of componants that create concern. The saying goes "Do Not bite the Hand that Feeds you."....!
But when suppliers are adding substances that Do Harm to users of their Product, we have a Major Problem.
We have to rely on "Wistleblowers" to get the True story.....!
The sewer is deep, and very well funded by "Big pHarma".
Corruption is rife at All levels of Industrial corporations.
It takes a certain type of Hero, to turn his back on "Monetery Benefits" to keep quiet and not expose the culprits for what they are.
Here we have one example of an Industry Martyr, who would rather resign his position, than "cow tow", to Criminal behavior, that worries more about shareholders Profits, than Public Health issues. Well done Sir, thank you for standing up against the Devils Agents of Doom. You are a true Hero....One of the Few.@

4 0 Reply • Share ›

Seabreezes1
4 days ago

Kudos to Dr. Brian Berridge!

His court testimony was clear, professional and on point. And... his frank interview as reported here which extends into material prohibited from court discussion further supports the fact of his intellectual discipline, professional integrity and personal courage!

As to the ADA Fluoridation spokesman who mischaracterizes the 2019-2020 NASEM review and refuses to read the final 2022 NTP report which did pass rigorous review with comments of "state-of-the art" but was scuttled by Adm. Levine, all I can say is a "special circle in hell" is reserved for those who do nothing to stop evil.

2 0 Reply • Share ›

MICHAEL
5 days ago edited

Has anyone looked long and hard at whether Fluoride actually prevents tooth decay or promotes tooth health? With all the corruption I see, we need to start at the beginning and not allow any statement to be used unless it has solid science behind it. Policy debates suffer miserably from assumptions. Most of them could never get started because they have no proven facts to rely on. (IE....climate change is being caused by greenhouse gases even though 10,000 expert scientists worldwide say "no")

2 0 Reply • Share ›

Teresa Franklin → MICHAEL
3 days ago

It actually doesn't matter if it prevents tooth decay if it is reducing IQ and causing osteoarthritis, dental and skeletal sclerosis, ect....But, yes, studies have been done. Not the right way - but the evidence lies in the fact that tooth decay/caries have declined across the board in developed countries, regardless of whether the water is fluorodated.

1 0 Reply • Share ›

Seabreezes1 → MICHAEL
4 days ago

Oh yes..... it doesn't and never did.

How effective and cost-effective is water fluoridation for adults and adolescents? The LOTUS 10-year retrospective cohort study. Moore, d. et al. Community Dent Oral Epidemiol. 2024

Evaluation of water fluoridation scheme in Cumbria: the CATFISH prospective longitudinal cohort study. Goodwin M, et al. Public Health Res 2022.

"The Fluoride Deception" by Christopher Bryson (2004)

The Lost Control and Other Mysteries: Further Revelations on New Zealand's Fluoridation Trial. John Colquhoun & Bill Wilson. Accountability in Research.1999; Vol 6, pp. 373-394.

"Fluoridation: Errors & Omissions in Experimental Trials" by Philip R.N. Sutton 2nd edition (1960)

1 0 Reply • Share ›

Teresa Franklin → MICHAEL
3 days ago

hey michael - see the graph I posted today. It is not a controlled trial, but it is what is happening.

0 0 Reply • Share ›

Ektor
4 days ago

These are not health agencies. They are agents of death and nothing else.

1 0 Reply • Share ›

jann
4 days ago

I don't know if Fauci was involved but I found this NIH grant: https://nexus.od.nih.gov/al... R01 (or R01-equivalent) grant has traditionally been a critical component to the launch of one's research career.

1 0 Reply • Share ›

jann
5 days ago

If both the CDC and the NIDCR are under the NIH, I believe they would have gotten funding from Fauci. Maybe he should testify as he was known for rewarding scientists whose studies showed what he wanted. I also wonder who is paying off the ADA.

1 0 Reply • Share ›

graham321
5 days ago

It's absolutely $candalous, and worse it's one of many reasons why we will never get to achieve our true potential, and this is why it's in the water, along with over 100 other chemicals. We literally NEED the aliens to land now and/or take over the airwaves and let people know exactly what is going on and how they are doing it because they are SO dumbed down they just don't even go looking for the truth. Once you are awake it is very hard to live knowing just what is going on and also knowing that you will never be able to get to any point whereby you can change it unless they are all awakened, then it will be so easy. I can't wait for whatever is coming to make this so and i hope it will be very soon.

1 0 Reply • Share ›

Teresa Franklin
3 days ago

0 0 Reply • Share ›

kaoshispano
4 days ago

Across the world the people is taking Justice by their own hands... no other way they made. God finaly will do ALL THE WORK in this Apoc time.

0 0 Reply • Share ›

Timothy Campbell
4 days ago edited

One must take into account, that Fluoride, Chlorine, Bromine, and Iodine are in the halide portion of the periodic table of elements. Therefore, these other halides compete for the receptor sites on the thyroid where iodine should be taken up to make your thyroid hormones of T3(triiodothyronine) three molecules of iodine, and T4(tetraiodothyronine) four molecules of iodine. The incidence of autoimmune thyroid Hashimoto's thyroiditis is on the increase. I wonder why? Do we need fluoride in our drinking water? The science and literature do not support the argument in favor of it. We would all benefit from cleaning up our environment with all the endocrine disruptors which is having a negative impact on every living thing on Mother Earth.

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Stephen Simac
4 days ago

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